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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
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Summary record of the 41st meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 2 October 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bras Gomes

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Second periodic report of Turkmenistan (*continued*) (E/C.12/TKM/2; E/C.12/TKM/Q/2 and E/C.12/TKM/Q/2/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Turkmenistan took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that State expenditure on education had decreased between 2015 and 2017 following the introduction of tuition fees at many higher and further education institutions. Spending on utilities had also dropped since the introduction in 2017 of water meters that limited the amount of water used, thereby capping charges. The reduction in spending on sanitation was due to increased investment from companies working in that sector, which reduced the need for State subsidies.

3. **Mr. Ergeshov** (Turkmenistan) said that, in 2017, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, trade unions and other stakeholders had worked together to develop legislation on the early detection of workplace-related illnesses and compensation for workplace accidents. If a person developed a disability as a result of a workplace-related illness, the State provided medicines and treatment free of charge, as well incapacity benefits if the person was unable to work.

4. **Ms. Atajanova** (Turkmenistan) said that the national action plan on children had been adopted in July 2018. In October 2018, the plan would be presented to parliamentary deputies, representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, with the participation of children themselves. The Government was working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to develop a road map for the implementation of the plan, which included a comprehensive suite of measures aimed at protecting the best interests of children and contained goals, targets and indicators that were aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2011, a State programme had been adopted on early childhood development and readiness for school. In 2012, the Government had established a juvenile justice programme based on recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

5. The Government had adopted a national action plan on trafficking in persons for the period 2016–2018. Following a review of the action plan in August 2018, the authorities had decided to draft anti-trafficking legislation that was in line with international standards. According to information from the Prosecutor General, no cases of child trafficking had been recorded in Turkmenistan.

6. Before drafting legislation criminalizing domestic violence, the Government was awaiting the results of a study intended to determine the scale of the problem in the country. It also intended to examine the legislative practices and law enforcement mechanisms in place in other countries in the region to identify the best course of action. As part of the national action plan on gender equality, the authorities were holding outreach seminars to sensitize the population to the issue. There were already a number of provisions in the Criminal Code that covered assault and rape.

7. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government had not set a national poverty line. While the most recent survey of household spending dated back to 2011, the State Statistics Committee was working with the World Bank on a project to examine current standards of living; the outcome of that exercise would be published once the data had been collected and processed.

8. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that, in both the Soviet and the post-independence eras, residential properties had frequently been constructed in breach of the legislation in place, and sometimes with the collusion of the local authorities. Under the Housing Code, if land was required for State purposes, residents would be offered a new property or

compensation equal in value to the property earmarked for demolition. If residents were required to vacate their homes in such circumstances, they were provided with temporary accommodation for a period not exceeding three years while their new permanent homes were under construction. In 2016, 1,015 homes had been demolished in Ashgabat and 1,091 properties built to replace them; in 2017, 1,759 had been demolished and 2,225 built in their place; and in the first eight months of 2018, 135 had been demolished and 170 had been built. Reports that people were forced to live on the streets were completely inaccurate; the Government always consulted with families regarding the options available to them prior to the demolition of homes.

9. **Mr. Haljanov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government intended to examine the feasibility of acceding to International Labour Organization (ILO) Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), with a view to aligning the labour inspection system with international standards. In 2017, an ILO delegation had visited Turkmenistan to examine the country's efforts to prevent all forms of forced labour and discuss steps to improve legislation in that area: the delegation's recommendations had been implemented to the satisfaction of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. Local and regional employment offices and education authorities were making strenuous efforts to prevent forced labour in the cotton sector, including child labour. On-site inspections were carried out to check the employment contracts of persons found working in fields. It was worth noting that the use of combine harvesters had been increased to reduce the amount of manual labour required. In 2017 and 2018, the Government had purchased 1,200 combine harvesters from Uzbekistan and a further 700 from companies in the United States of America.

10. Turkmenistan had become a full member of ILO and had ratified the Organization's eight fundamental conventions. The Government was currently engaged in consultations with social partners regarding the feasibility of ratifying the ILO Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) and Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143). It was also developing a plan of action on decent work for the period 2019–2021, with expert assistance from ILO. In November 2018, a technical delegation from the Organization would be visiting Turkmenistan to assist in the development of the plan and consult with stakeholders.

11. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection had an oversight mechanism in place to identify cases of forced labour and make recommendations to local authorities. Reports that the Government was chasing people off the land were simply untrue; 70 per cent of the land used to cultivate cotton and wheat was in private hands. The textile industry had been rebuilt after the country had gained independence, and it was now able to operate independently.

12. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that under the plan to protect the rights and interests of persons with disabilities, work had been done to detect illnesses and disabilities at an early stage and prevent their progression. A bill was being prepared on government purchasing of goods produced by associations of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable persons. Data for 2017 showed that 76 per cent of people who had sought help from employment offices had secured a job; that figure had increased from 50 per cent in 2016. In January 2016, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection had approved regulations on the provision of housing for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable persons. Since then, consultations had been held with medical experts in order to determine categories of disability depending on the level of impairment. Data collection had begun in early 2018 with a view to identifying the number of posts that would be set aside for those population categories. Within the first few months of the scheme, 17 per cent of persons with disabilities had found employment. Steps were being taken to ensure that individuals were matched to posts suited to their physical condition. The Government intended to introduce a national disability register containing the personal information of persons with disabilities, including their ability to work, and had launched a tendering process to select the organizations that would assist in the establishment of the register.

13. **Mr. Ergeshov** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government remained committed to improving the quality of drinking water. It had introduced a robust drinking water policy under which water supplies were closely monitored to ensure that they complied with

international quality standards. Concerning the use of pesticides and the consumption of genetically modified foods, the Government had taken steps to strictly enforce the national environmental protection code, establish a food quality commission and ban the import and production of genetically modified foods. In 2015, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had recognized the country's achievements in terms of food security.

14. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that he strongly contested reports concerning the existence of a newly constructed but abandoned town located in a remote area of the country. The town in question had been constructed to accommodate some 3,400 families. During the first phase of construction, 1,860 families had been offered new homes and a school, three preschools, an arts centre and a place of worship had been built. In the second phase, some 1,536 families had moved into new accommodation and a further two schools, four preschools and a hospital had been built. New roads in and out of the town had also been constructed and other essential infrastructure and facilities had been installed. While there might have been a few teething problems in terms of water and electricity supply during the construction period, it was incorrect to state that citizens of the town had been entirely without basic services.

15. The national housing policy aimed to improve living standards and provided for the construction of modern, fully accessible accommodation using high-quality materials. It was unfortunate that some media outlets had spread fake news regarding the demolition of properties in a small town 40 km from the capital. In reality, work was under way to build luxury modern residential blocks to replace the existing dilapidated buildings. Temporary accommodation had been made available to all residents affected by the construction work.

16. Regarding prison overcrowding, the Government had taken steps to improve detention conditions with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Between 2011 and 2018, it had allocated more than US$ 17 million to refurbish prisons and purchase modern medical equipment. An additional US$ 6.3 million had also been set aside to improve prison hygiene and sanitary facilities. Hygiene products and medicines were readily accessible to all prisoners and special dietary and health provisions had been made for pregnant women prisoners and prisoners with disabilities. More than 1,700 prisoners had been pardoned in September 2018. Reports of some 30,000 prisoners being housed in a prison designed to accommodate 13,000 were unfounded. Prison inspections were conducted on a regular basis to prevent that type of situation.

17. The Government remained committed to the rational use of water and had proposed the drafting of a special United Nations General Assembly resolution to protect the Aral Sea. It had launched a number of water-saving initiatives and had built new water treatment and desalination plants to safeguard the national water supply. Some 19 million trees had also been planted as part of a national green-belt project to combat desertification and raise the mineral content of the soil.

18. **Mr. Ergeshov** (Turkmenistan) said that the number of medical graduates had risen steadily over recent years. In 2018, some 404 medical students had graduated, as compared to 299 in 2014. That increase had improved the ratio of doctors to patients in both urban and rural areas, from 25.2 doctors per 10,000 persons in 2014 to 26.1 per 10,000 in 2017. A similar upwards trend had also been recorded for other categories of medical professional.

19. Efforts were under way to combat corruption in medical institutions. Following the adoption of national anti-corruption legislation and the establishment of special monitoring commissions in every medical facility, no further cases of corruption within the health-care sector had been reported. In the event of future corruption cases, robust investigations would be conducted and strict sanctions would be handed down, including dismissals.

20. Action had been taken to improve access to medicines and strengthen local pharmaceutical production. During the reporting period, five new pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities had opened. The output of the national pharmaceutical industry had subsequently increased dramatically: over 40 per cent of medicines were now produced domestically. The introduction of mobile pharmacies guaranteed access to medicines, even in rural and remote areas.

21. **Ms. Shin** (Country Task Force) noted that protests had recently been held in front of United Nations headquarters in New York calling for an end to the practice of forcing teachers and schoolchildren to pick cotton in Turkmenistan. While welcoming the State party's commitment to stopping forced labour in the cotton fields, she would like to know whether efforts would also be made to end the forced mobilization of people for public events, particularly in light of the death of a university student during one such gathering. Similarly, she wondered whether the Government intended to repeal the restrictions on the employment of women in certain harmful or hazardous working conditions and allow women to make their own choices regarding employment.

22. In view of the State party's commitment to consider criminalizing violence against women, she urged the Government to take into account the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's general recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, of 2017. New legislation to combat violence against women should include robust enforcement mechanisms such as annual national surveys on the prevalence of gender-based violence that enabled the Government to monitor the situation closely and make the necessary policy amendments, where appropriate.

23. **Mr. Sadi** said that he would like to know more about the causes of trafficking in women and children in the country. Given the transnational nature of the phenomenon, he would be intrigued to know whether the State party had concluded agreements with neighbouring countries in order to find joint solutions to the problem. He also wondered why no cases of human trafficking had been reported or investigated during the reporting period.

24. While he appreciated that the State party had laws and plans in place to address family violence, he would welcome further information about cases of family violence that had come before the courts. He was particularly interested to know whether the State party had criminalized marital rape and, if not, its reasons for not doing so.

25. Regarding the right to adequate food, he wished to know what level of control the Government had over the use of pesticides in fruit and vegetable cultivation, considering that such chemicals could cause cancer, and whether programmes had been implemented to raise awareness of such hazards. Similarly, he wondered whether awareness campaigns had been carried out to inform people about the nature of adequate food — meaning healthy food according to the latest scientific findings — and to warn them about contaminated food. If genetically modified organisms were present in the food that was available in Turkmenistan, were people warned about them and offered an alternative?

26. **Ms. Liebenberg** said that the Committee understood that the demolitions carried out in Ashgabat in the context of the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games had caused several problems. In particular, Human Rights Watch and the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights had reported that they had not detected any cases of any monetary compensation being provided, while the replacement accommodation provided was not equivalent to the value of the expropriated property because the authorities had not taken into account outbuildings or additional structures in their calculations. Therefore, she would be grateful if the delegation would indicate the number of people who had been offered monetary compensation, describe how it was calculated, and comment on the claim that the authorities' calculations had only taken into account persons holding formal residence permits (*propiska*), but not family members, so that families of 10 or 15 were now living in two- or three-bedroom apartments. How much notice were residents given before demolitions took place and were they able to challenge the demolitions before the courts? Lastly, she would welcome an explanation of why families had been offered apartments with a higher value than the expropriated property and were required to pay the difference in price or become homeless.

27. **Mr. Uprimny** said that the data he had referred to on the number of inmates and the official capacity of a particular prison came from the World Prison Brief, an online database hosted by Birkbeck, University of London. The information on abuses in the prison system was drawn from recent annual reports of Human Rights Watch.

28. **The Chair** said that she wished to reassure the delegation that the Committee did not involve itself in the dissemination of "fake news". Its sources of information included governments and national and international NGOs; all sources were researched and validated. While she was grateful for the information that the State party had provided on the relocation of families into new apartments, she would like to know where those families came from and whether the new apartments were accessible to all families. Considering that, in its concluding observations, the Committee was likely to refer to its general comments on the right to adequate housing and forced evictions and to the basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement, drawn up by the former Special Rapporteur on the right to housing in 2007, she asked to what extent the State party took those comments and principles into account when developing its policies. Lastly, she suggested that Turkmenistan might consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, since a dialogue with the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture would be useful for improving conditions in prisons.

29. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said she agreed that the Government should proceed cautiously in its review of the list of restrictions on the employment of women. It was still working towards approval of the list, which remained pending despite the current labour legislation having been introduced in July 2009. The Government would take on board the recommendations of the Committee and of authoritative international organizations such as ILO in that process.

30. **Mr. Ergeshov** (Turkmenistan) said that Turkmenistan had strict regulations and standards covering the use of genetically modified organisms, pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers and the safe transport and use of chemicals. The accepted level of pesticides in food was strictly regulated by a 2009 decree of the Ministry of Health. Importing and producing food that contained genetically modified organisms was banned under food safety laws. Moreover, since 2015, a new law on food security had been adopted and a new State Commission for Food Security established. A National Programme on Healthy Nutrition had been implemented and had been assessed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, with positive results. In 2016 and 2017, the Ministry of Health had participated in a nutritional study that was part of the FEEDCities project, coordinated by WHO and the University of Porto. The main television channel broadcast a programme called *Healthy Nation* to promote a healthy way of life and healthy food, and awareness-raising was carried out among all population groups.

31. **Ms. Atajanova** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government was already taking account of the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, as recommended by Ms. Shin. A law on domestic violence had not yet been adopted, but the Government was analysing the experiences of other States and considering whether to establish a dedicated institutional mechanism to enforce a future law in that area. In that context, it had observed that in countries like Turkey and Kazakhstan, prosecutors' offices, interior ministries and women's ministries had established specific departments to deal with domestic violence. Turkmenistan did not have any such mechanism, but instead relied on general oversight and monitoring; crimes of domestic violence were dealt with by the police, under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Marital rape was not currently classed as a crime under Turkmen law. While the Government would continue to study international standards with a view to incorporating them into national legislation, it was bound to take Turkmen traditions, mentalities and family values into account, considering that there were some standards that the population would not accept. The Government was working to improve the general public's awareness of their rights.

32. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the organizers of the demonstration held outside United Nations Headquarters were entitled to their views; however, the Government had the right to disagree with them. Considering the double standards of some NGOs, the Government preferred to work with partners who had specialized knowledge, such as international organizations, and was prepared to accept their recommendations and standards.

33. In respect of the "forced participation in State-organized mass events" that had been mentioned by a member of the Committee, the reality was that civilians could choose to voluntarily participate in various events. The information that a university student had died at a public event was unconfirmed and had been disseminated by unreliable sources. The Government regretted the unfortunate imbalance that affected much of the information that was provided in respect of Turkmenistan, and welcomed the opportunity to provide official information to the Committee.

34. Turkmenistan cooperated on a bilateral basis with Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States to combat trafficking, and it regularly held consultations on related issues. Recognizing that individuals sometimes left Turkmenistan in order to earn a living and subsequently faced discrimination, the Government worked with receiving countries to address that problem.

35. The demolition of housing and the development of a large housing complex outside Ashgabat — a project that was unrelated to the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, which had taken place inside the city — had been planned partly as a solution to rampant crime, violations of housing standards and the tapping of energy and water resources. Residents were given notification two weeks before the planned demolition and were offered the choice of going into old housing or purchasing more comfortable accommodation by making up the difference from their own funds. The Government had accepted the demands of people who had lived in the demolished buildings to be given more spacious accommodation, subject to certain financial conditions: it was not obliged to provide them with extra space for free.

36. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Rapporteur) said that, in view of the fact that mother-tongue instruction for small ethnic minorities was not financially viable, and the difficulties in finding teachers and teaching materials for such instruction, he would be interested to know whether any cooperation agreements had been reached with States that had special organizations to promote and teach their national language in other countries. Such agreements might be beneficial for ethnic minorities who wished to learn in their mother tongue.

37. The Committee was concerned that the issue of obstacles to studying abroad had again been raised by NGOs and other sources. In that regard, he would be grateful for clarification of whether Turkmen citizens who applied to study abroad were exempted from military service and whether university diplomas obtained abroad were recognized upon their return to Turkmenistan. For example, were any agreements in place to recognize qualifications obtained in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States?

38. Considering that the practice of taking bribes for access to higher education establishments was becoming less common in the post-Soviet era as new admissions criteria and structures were introduced, he was curious to know whether any cases had occurred in which universities had been held accountable for taking bribes to accept students. Given that the State party had referred to its celebration of cultural events, including those of other countries, he asked whether the State budget provided for the direct funding of cultural events of national minorities, what budget was allocated for such events, and what the procedure was for cultural organizations to receive State support.

39. Noting that Turkmenistan had launched a telecommunications satellite that could provide nationwide Internet coverage, he asked whether the Internet was generally accessible in remote regions. What criteria or rules were applied in order to block extremist or terrorist websites, and were such sites blocked in practice? Lastly, he wondered whether the unregistered religious organizations mentioned in the replies to the list of issues had in fact made applications that had been refused. If so, he wished to know more about the criteria for registration and how the Government responded to the continued activities of unregistered religious organizations.

40. **Mr. Dasgupta** (Country Task Force) said that it would be useful to the Committee if the delegation could indicate whether statistics were available on the prevalence of child labour and whether any measures were planned to address that problem. Noting that he had requested statistics indicating the extent to which the State party had complied with the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals, he said that he assumed no such

information was available. The Committee had heard that the Government defined the poverty line at $5 a day of purchasing power parity, where the United Nations standard had been set at $2. The delegation should specify whether the $5 level was based on the official exchange rate for the manat. The State party report referred to "improved" drinking water, which the delegation had explained was the same as clean drinking water. The replies to the list of issues provided statistics from 2006, while the current standards dated from 2016. How could the results of the study performed in 2006 relate to water quality standards that had only been adopted 10 years later?

41. **Mr. Abashidze** said that the Committee would like to receive information about assistance provided by the State to persons living with disabilities who were unfit for employment and the system for identifying such persons. What specific programmes were aimed at reducing the gender gap for wages and salaries, and was there a specific time frame for the eradication of the gap? One of the most difficult problems facing post-Soviet countries was the demolition of houses in central areas and their replacement with administrative or other buildings as part of the transition to a market economy. The circumstances of the persons who were evicted in that process should perhaps be taken into account. For example, the State could show more flexibility in implementing its policies and could leave open the possibility of legalizing homes built without authorization rather than demolishing them. The Committee would like to know whether the Government kept records on persons living with HIV/AIDS, whether any systems for treatment had been set up and whether the law provided for non-discrimination against such persons.

42. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the Government was fairly tolerant with regard to unregistered religious organizations, including for instance the Jehovah's Witnesses. There was a procedure for the registration of religious organizations. Those that met the criteria were reviewed by a commission and duly registered. The commission had not refused any applications, and the authorities also cooperated with religious organizations that had not been registered. In July 2018, the State, Law and Democracy Institute had convened a meeting of religious organizations, and unregistered ones had been invited to take part as well, along with representatives of the media and government ministries. Unregistered organizations were free to practise their customs and traditions within their own regions, but not outside the legally established framework for religious activities.

43. Under the national legislation on Internet services and protection of information, certain websites were blocked. There were no restrictions on access to websites other than those that were prohibited owing to propaganda of terrorist or extremist views or ideologies. The State party report contained statistics on the use of Internet services such as Facebook and Twitter. The satellite coverage zone extended across numerous countries in the Middle East, Europe, Asia and North Africa, and discussions were currently under way on the possible launch of a second Turkmen satellite. The Government was aware that there was corruption in the education sector and it worked to control it. It had thus prosecuted 21 criminal cases involving corruption not only at institutions of higher learning, but also in nursery, primary and secondary schools. Students certified as being enrolled at foreign universities received deferments and were temporarily exempt from national military service obligations and allowed to leave the country for their studies. There was no ban on study in other countries. The recognition of foreign degrees was regulated by law, in accordance with bilateral agreements on mutual recognition that had been concluded with various States.

44. There was a large number of ethnic minorities living in Turkmenistan, and most considered that the Russian language was the language of intercultural communication. The realization of minority language rights thus often manifested itself in the use of Russian as a lingua franca. Ethnic festivals such as the Moon Festival were celebrated, and Russian was widely used by members of the ethnic minorities. There were several ethnic and cultural centres and theatres in the country, including some representing Turkish, Iranian, Russian and French culture.

45. **Ms. Babayeva** (Turkmenistan) said that the Ministry of Education had entered into numerous international agreements that allowed Turkmen students to study at universities in other countries, including the Russian Federation, Belarus, China and Turkey. The

Ministry held annual sessions that provided specific information on university-level educational opportunities abroad. Turkmen students who enrolled in such programmes faced no problems at all in leaving the country. According to the latest available figures, nearly 70,000 Turkmen students, about 40 per cent of whom were women, were studying abroad. In 2017 some 9,400 foreign diplomas had been validated by the authorities, and so far in 2018, 3,200 had been validated. A presidential decree issued in 2013 regulated study abroad, which could take place in the context of international agreements or through private initiatives. The Labour Code included provisions to accommodate foreign students and Turkmen students studying abroad through distance learning.

46. When the national or traditional holidays of neighbouring States were celebrated in Turkmenistan, all travel and accommodation expenses for groups arriving in Turkmenistan to take part in such celebrations were covered from the State budget. Cultural celebrations were organized not only in the capital, but also in other towns and cities. For example, an Uzbek cultural festival had been opened in Ashgabat and continued in Daşoguz, a town with a large Uzbek population, in late 2017. Film festivals and other celebrations were scheduled to coincide with the national holidays of the ethnic minorities and were supported by the Ministry of Culture, which worked closely with the embassies of the countries concerned.

47. **Ms. Sysoyeva** (Turkmenistan) said that domestic legislation had been amended in 2013 to lower the minimum age of employment to 18, thus bringing it into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). Similarly, the law had been changed so that there would no longer be a category of children living with disabilities under the age of 16; the law now referred to children living with disabilities under the age of 18. Only persons who had completed 11 years of mandatory schooling could enter the workforce before the age of 18, but that very rarely occurred. They now accounted for less than 0.2 per cent of the registered workforce.

48. **Mr. Ergeshov** (Turkmenistan) said that a programme to improve access to clean water by the year 2020 was currently being implemented. The use of the word "improved" meant that the water had been filtered and purified and that it was safe, and its chemical and bacteriological characteristics were subject to constant monitoring. In urban areas, 98 per cent of the population had access to clean water, and in rural areas over 70 per cent did. Over half the population used piped water, while the rest used water from wells or water distribution trucks. In towns, toilet and sanitation facilities were generally modern, but in rural areas, outhouses were still widely in use.

49. No new cases of HIV had been registered during the reporting period. A national programme to combat HIV had been implemented and a law had been adopted in 2016 with the aim of combating the spread of the virus. The law set out the State policy in respect of education on HIV and provided for the protection of the rights of and provision of social benefits to persons infected with HIV.

50. **Ms. Babayeva** (Turkmenistan) said that, at tertiary level, most educational establishments taught courses in the Turkmen language or, for engineering and certain courses such as those at the International Oil and Gas University, in English. Parents tended to prefer that Russian, Turkmen or a foreign language should be used for instruction at the primary and secondary levels. There were currently 71 schools conducting their classes in Russian. Russian was taught at all schools, along with English as a second foreign language, and language classes were also available in German, French, Japanese and Chinese.

51. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Turkmenistan) said that the delegation would study the Committee's inputs to the dialogue and would report them to the Government. The Committee's wealth of experience was of great value. The suggestion to consider the possibility of declaring an amnesty to curb the practice of demolition and eviction was of particular interest.

52. **Mr. Abashidze** said that the situation in Turkmenistan had clearly changed since the State party's 2011 report, and welcomed the fact that the State party was now showing the political will to deal with a number of issues. The Committee's aim in engaging in a dialogue was to draw attention to points that required attention or study. He expressed satisfaction at the constructive tone of the dialogue. The Committee would no doubt

express the wish that the Government would consider accession to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, as the individual complaints mechanism provided an effective channel to draw attention to structural problems that required action to improve observance of the economic, social and cultural rights of all citizens. The Government might also consider requesting technical assistance from the Committee itself, or inviting former members of the Committee to work with it, for example in the activities of the State, Law and Democracy Institute.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.